

Thank you Mr. Tripodakis. President McGrew. Dean Vergos.
Distinguished faculty. Proud friends and family. Class of 2007!
Thank you for the honor of speaking to you today.

Scientific research has shown that the average attention span of a graduating student during a commencement ceremony is about 30 seconds, so most of you have already stopped listening to me and are busily thinking about the celebration you are going to have later tonight. I don't blame you! I wish I could join you.

However, for those of you who are still with me I am going to give you some advice. I have at least 100 pieces of advice I would like to share. Advice that I wish someone had given me when I was graduating from college so I could have avoided many mistakes!

Fortunately for you the management of Perrotis college has told me not to speak longer than 10 minutes. So I will limit myself to just 7 pieces of advice on planning your future.

But first, I want to mention one of the most famous commencement speeches of all time. It was also about 10 minutes long, it was also delivered by an employee of the U.S. State Department: and that was U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall, who told the Harvard University Class of 1947 how the U.S. planned to help Europe recover from WWII. This help became known as the Marshall Plan. Under this plan, America provided \$13B of aid to Europe from 47-52, of which Greece received \$1.2B. The Plan helped feed many hungry people, rebuilt infrastructure and revived Europe's economy.

My remarks, alas, are much more modest in scope, and I won't be distributing a billion dollars afterwards! Judging by your happy faces, however, it seems you have survived your years at Perrotis College quite well, and don't need any major reconstruction or recovery. But all graduates should have a plan, and here are my suggestions for how you should go about making your plan.

First piece of advice: Know yourself. Or as the ancient Greeks said «Γνώθι σ' εαυτόν.» Life is a journey. Before you start speeding down the highway of post-graduate endeavor, it's important to know whether you are riding a horse or a bicycle. Different vehicles, like people, are better suited for different paths.

Choose your path based on what you know about yourself, your strengths, your weaknesses, and you will have a much better chance of getting where you want to go. Before Secretary Marshall wrote his plan he asked the Europeans to tell him what kind of help they wanted, rather than imposing his own American plan, because the Europeans knew their needs and infrastructure best. Your own plan should be based on you and your needs, not on someone else's pre-conceived notion.

Second, have a goal that will guide you on your journey, regardless of your destination and the obstacles you encounter. Aim high. For example, here are my suggested goals for the Class of 2007: 1. Solve world hunger. 2. Cure cancer. 3. Save the rainforests. You can do this by applying your expertise in agriculture or a related field, or, through other jobs worthy of a Perrotis College graduate: e.g. PM of Greece, CEO of Monsanto, United Nations Secretary General. Be bold, take risks. Be patient. It may take you three or four tries to get elected Prime Minister. But if you stay focused on your goal, and believe in yourself, you will be successful.

The lifelong goal of one of America's first successful agronomists, George Washington, was to create a diversified, profitable agrobusiness. His efforts were constantly interrupted by military service in the French and Indian Wars, then the War of Independence, then two terms as President of the United States, but he was finally able to devote the last three years of his life to cultivating over 60 crops on his 32,000 stremmata farm in Virginia. As founding father and founding farmer, he never lost sight of his goal.

Third, work together with others to achieve your goals. Form partnerships, build coalitions. I know this is a radical idea for some people in the Balkans. But as graduates of Perrotis College, you have already learned that there is strength in diversity, and that by working towards a common goal, you can overcome cultural, ethnic, language and religious differences. And that despite the wars and other tragedies of the past century in the Balkans, there is much more that unites you than divides you.

Fourth. If you don't like something, change it. Take responsibility and don't wait for someone else to solve the problem. If, for example, you are concerned about global warming, do something about it. Start a recycling program, ride your bicycle instead of your car. Produce bio-fuels. Stop smoking. It is difficult to change the world when you have lung cancer. In 1996, doctors told professional cyclist Lance Armstrong he had terminal lung cancer. Armstrong refused to accept this fate. In less than three years he had conquered his illness and won the Tour de France, the most physically demanding race in the world. He won the race six more times before retiring, and is now a leading fund-raiser and inspiration for cancer victims everywhere. You too can be an agent of change.

Fifth. Never stop learning. I am sorry to tell you this on graduation day, but your “final” exams were not really final. Life is a series of exams. Graduate school, job interviews, elections, licenses, business plans. You will be asked to prove yourself over and over again. And just when you think you’ve mastered one lesson, it will change. Don’t become too satisfied with yourself or your achievements. Keep sharpening your skills and equipping yourself for life’s expected and unexpected challenges. Former AFS President Bruce Landsdale is a living example of a life-long student and educator. Aside from his many other activities at Metamorphosi, he is helping the Consulate produce a documentary on the history of Greece during the Marshall Plan years. Bruce and Tad are inspiration for students everywhere that learning never stops.

Sixth, use your time as if it were your most valuable resource. Because it is. Focus on the important things, like reducing human suffering or preserving the environment or spreading knowledge. Let others worry about petty politics, fashions. Spend time with people you care about. Devote time to causes that deserve it.

Every morning when you wake up, ask yourself, am I proud of what I have done with my life so far and am I excited about what I am going to do today? If the answer is more often “no” than “yes”, consider changing course.

7th. Remember how you got where you are today. Remember the Farm School and all those who helped get you here and helped you succeed at Perrotis College. It will give you strength and perspective as you struggle and progress towards your goals. Remember those who helped Europe get back on its feet after 2nd WW. Honor your teachers. Cherish your parents. Thank them and tell them you love them, not just today, but as often as you can, until they tell you they are tired of hearing it, which they never will.

Speaking of tired of hearing something, my time is up. Thank you for again for this honor. I congratulate you and the entire Farm School family for what you have achieved and what you will achieve. Good luck in making and carrying out your plans. I wish you peace, health and happiness wherever your journey takes you.

Thank you